

PREFERRED MONARCHY TO REPUBLIC

1 Samuel 2:1-10—March 7.
Israel a Theocracy—Humanly a Republic—A Kingdom Preferred—Samuel Offended—The Request Granted. Saul, Son of Kish—His Anointing.

"For God, honor the king."—1 Peter 2:17.

ISRAEL'S government was a theocracy; i. e., God was their King. His Law their government. The elders of each tribe supervised its affairs. God provided a priestly tribe, which represented the people's religious interests. Prophets and judges were sent from time to time as special messengers of the Lord, but without authority except as the people believed their counsels. Thus Israel was, so far as its earthly interests were concerned, a republic, in its relationship with God.

Our lesson shows that the Israelites did not appreciate their Divinely arranged republic. They beheld the splendor of the nations surrounding them, and thought that because they were different, it was to their disadvantage. Samuel was growing old, and they feared that his sons would succeed him as judges. These sons were unreliable—



The Prophet Samuel.

walked not in his ways, but turned aside after their own hearts, and took bribes, and perverted judgment. The elders of the tribes conferred together, and believed that it would be better to choose from amongst themselves a king, and thus become more like the nations round about. They came to Samuel and told him their desires. Samuel was disappointed, but gave them no answer until he had conferred with God. The Lord bade him not to be offended, but God and His government. God was willing to let them have their experiences with kings, and instructed Samuel to inform them fully what would be the consequences. Samuel explained that the kings would exercise more or less autocratic power and would conscript their sons for servants, for soldiers and for public works; that their liberties would be greatly abridged; that their wealth would more or less flow into the king's coffers, etc.

Divine Foreknowledge Illustrated.

At the appointed time Samuel, having received instructions from the Lord, came in contact with the future king Saul, son of Kish. A herd of asses having strayed from Kish's farm, Saul was sent to seek them. After searching in vain, he called upon the Prophet to ask where the asses were. The answer was that the asses were found, but that Saul was to dine with the Promoter in an appointed place, where other guests had been invited.

The place of honor was given Saul, who was summoned to bear the Prophet's word of God as Israel's choice for king. He modestly called attention to the fact that he belonged to a small tribe, Benjamin, and that his family was the least in Israel. But the Prophet persisted.

The next morning he was directed, respecting his journey in such a manner that he would have corroborations of things that the Prophet had intimated. Moreover, he was to have experiences which would make him a changed man. As the two walked together, the Prophet drew forth a vial of oil and poured it upon Saul's head, anointing him king of Israel by Divine appointment. However, matters were to be kept secret until a later time.

Saul's faith in the Prophet's declaration was strengthened by the fulfillment of the experiences foretold. Meeting a company of the school of prophets, he joined in their singing and prophesying. We read, "God gave him another heart, and the Spirit of God came upon Saul, and he prophesied."

The Spirit of God signifies simply an invisible Power from God. Those coming under this Power acted sometimes in one way and sometimes in another, as they were moved by the Power of Jehovah. Since Pentecost, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit signifies that begotting influence which God gives to consecrated believers in our Lord Jesus and which brings them into God's family as sons and enables them more and more to appreciate the mind of God as expressed in the Bible. But presently, the Spirit signified simply a holy energy by which any person might be moved of the Lord to write, to do or to say whatever the Lord wished.



Saul, the King.

Israel's First King Chosen.

In due time, the people came together to Samuel to have the Lord's will expressed in the choice of a king amongst them. Again Samuel told them the dangers of leaving the simplicity of God's arrangement and taking up with the monarchical arrangement. But, seeing that they still desired a king, he acted for them and drew lots. Finally the lot fell upon Saul, as Samuel and Saul knew that it would; for they believed that God's hand was in the matter.

As the young man—probably seven feet tall, of athletic build—was brought forth, he filled the people's ideal. They were pleased with God's choice.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT

1 Samuel 11:1-15—March 14.

King Saul, Although Anointed of God, Waited For the Voice of the People. His Opportune Moment and How He Utilized It—His Acceptance by the People—Opportunities Open For All. Special Lessons to the Church, Also Called to Kingly Office.

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."—Proverbs 16:32.

ISRAEL had asked for a king. God, through the Prophet Samuel, had caused the anointing of Saul to be king. The people of Israel had assembled, and God's Prophet Samuel had indicated God's choice. Some had gladly accepted it, but the rougher element had refused, sneeringly saying, Who is he, that we should hope for anything great in his hand? It looked as though the Lord's choice had been unsatisfactory and had come to naught. Saul made no attempt to exercise authority, having such half-hearted support from the people. He returned home, resuming his life as a farmer; but we may be sure he was patiently waiting for the opportune, or psychological, moment when with God's blessing he would enter upon his duties and responsibilities as king.



Saul's farm life.

Saul's farm life continued only a month until the opportunity offered. The Ammonites, residing in the east of Israel's possessions, had for some time besieged Jabesh-gilead. When the city asked terms for surrender, the Ammonite general's taunt was that on one condition he would save their lives—they should each submit to having an eye put out, as a shame on Israel.

Time was asked—seven days—for decision. Meantime messengers were dispatched, possibly to all the tribes. Some came to Saul's residence, evidently hoping that he would take steps for their deliverance.

Saul was appointed leader; the psychological moment had come. He killed the oxen he had been driving and sent pieces to all the tribes, saying that whoever did not respond, to become a defender of the general interests, would have his oxen heaved to pieces. This was a peculiar command for a king; but it touched the right spot, for three hundred and thirty thousand men responded. The messengers returned to Jabesh-gilead with assurances of success the next day; and Israel gave answer to the besiegers that by the time appointed they would march out for them to do as they wished.

Saul divided his army into three sections, and from three different quarters came suddenly upon the besiegers, routing them and delivering the Israelites. Thereupon they realized that God had indeed given them a wise king, whom they had been slow to recognize; and they inquired for those who had spoken against Saul, saying, Let them now be slain. However, the king wisely and generously said, "There shall not a man be put to death; for today the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel."

The Divine Character Vindicated.

Although the slaughtering of those Ammonites had Divine approval, it did not signify that they went to the theological Hell, there to suffer eternal torments. On the contrary, they merely went to the tomb, to sleep until in God's arrangement Christ would die as the world's Redeemer, and at His Second Advent would begin His work of calling back from death all that are in their graves.

To grasp the situation we must remember that all men are under a death sentence; and it matters little whether they die from starvation, sickness, pestilence or the sword. The penalty reads, "Dying, thou shalt die"; not live, anywhere or anywhere. This fact has a distinct bearing on everything pertaining to the Lord's authorization of wars, permission of famines, etc.

While God has enforced the penalty, "The wages of sin is death," thus manifesting His Justice, He in another way has been preparing for the manifestation of His Love.



The 'Theological' Hell.

Special Lessons For the Church.

God's consecrated people may especially learn lessons from Saul's experience. They, like Saul, have been nominated of God, not only to be kings, but also to be priests—"a Royal Priesthood." As Saul was anointed with oil, so the Royal Priesthood are anointed with the Holy Spirit. As the people rejected Saul and he waited patiently for the Lord's time, so mankind are not yet ready for the Reign of the Royal Priesthood, of which Jesus is the Head; and God's time has not yet come for the establishment of the Kingdom. Lessons of patience, humility, and confidence in God are requisite that, after enduring, they might inherit the promises.

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